

# ~~COVENTRY~~ made Free by GODINA, Countess of CHESTER.

To the Tune of, *Prince Arthur died at Ludlow, &c.*

Note, As the Use of these Old Songs is very great, in respect that many Children never would have learn'd to Read, had they not took a Delight in poring over Jane Shore, or Robin Hood, &c. which has insensibly stole into them a Curiosity and Desire of Reading other the like Stories, 'till they have improv'd themselves more in a short time than perhaps they would have done in some Years at School: In order still to make them more useful, I premise to affix an Introduction, in which I shall point out what is Fact and what is Fiction in each Song; which will (as may be readily suppos'd, give not only Children, but Persons of more ripe Years, an Insight into the Reality, Intent and Design, as well as many times the Author and Time when such Song was made, which has not hitherto been explain'd.

Whether the Generality of our Historians look'd upon the following Story as fabulous, I cannot say; but upon the strictest Search, I could not meet with the least Account of it in any of our English Writers; I mean those who have left us their Histories in that Tongue. Leofrick or Leofricus, Duke of Mercia, or according to others, Earl of Chester, is indeed mentioned by every Writer, who has given us the Life of Edward the Confessor; and the Earl is set off by most of them, not only as a brave and wise General, but also as a Saint: And they tell us, he died in an advanced Age, in the Year 1057, and the 15th of King Edward. But as for the History of his Wife, we must have Recourse to Bromton, an Abbot, who has left us a Latin Chronicle of the most material Transactions in this Island, from the Year 588 to 1193. By him Godina, or as he calls her Godiva, is set off as one of the most pious Women of the Age: And he gives us a long Catalogue of the Religious Houses which she founded. The City of Coventry at that Time groaned under very heavy Taxes and Duties, which they paid Leofrick. Godina taking Pity on them, and seeing to what Poverty they were reduced by these burthensome Taxations, desired her Husband to remit them, which he would by no Means consent to; the Coventry Taxes being one of the best Branches of his Revenue: But the Countess still pressing him, he thought to silence her at once, by assuring her that he never would do it, unless she would ride naked from one End of the Town to the other; well



knowing the strict Virtue of his Wife, and believing her Modesty would never permit her to think of such a Thing. But she having a fine Head of Hair, comb'd it out, and so weav'd it round her, that no Part of her was left naked, save her Legs. Thus far Bromton. But at Coventry they tell us another Sort of a Story: Godina, say they, commanded that the Windows and Doors of every House should be shut up, whilst she was riding thro' the Town; and that no body should presume to look out under Pain of Death: And a poor Taylor, who would needs be peeping, was struck blind. In Commemoration of which, his Figure, there call'd the Peeper, is put in the same Window to this Day: And that of the Lady Godina is once a Year carried in Procession thro' every Street in Coventry.

**L** Eofricus, that Noble Earl  
Of Chester, as I read,  
Did for the City of Coventry  
Many a noble Deed:  
Great Privileges for the Town  
This Nobleman did get;  
And of all Things did make it so,  
That they Tole-free did sit.  
Save only that for Horses still  
They did some Custom pay,  
Which was great Charges to the Town,  
Full long and many a Day:  
Wherefore his Wife Godina fair,  
Did of the Earl request,  
That thereof he would make it free,  
As well as all the rest:  
So when that she long Time had sued,  
Her Purpose to obtain;  
Her Noble Lord at length she took,  
Within a merry Vein;  
And unto him with smiling Chear,  
She did forthwith proceed;  
Intreating greatly that he would  
Perform this goodly Deed,  
You move me much, my Fair, quoth he,  
Your Suit I fain would shun;  
But what will you perform and do,  
To have this Matter done?  
Why any Thing, my Lord, quoth she,  
You will with Reason crave;  
I will perform it with good Will,  
If I my Wish might have.  
If thou wilt grant the Thing, he said,  
That I shall now require,  
As soon as it is finished,  
Thou shalt have thy Desire.

Command what you think good, my Lord,  
I will thereto agree,  
On this Condition, That the Town  
For ever may be free.  
If thou thy Cloaths strip off,  
And here lay them down,  
And at Noon-day on Horse-back ride,  
Stark-Naked through the Town;  
They shall be free for evermore:  
If thou wilt not do so,  
More Liberty than now they have,  
I never will bestow.  
The Lady, at his strange Demand,  
Was much abash'd in Mind;  
And yet for to fulfil this Thing,  
She never a whit repin'd.  
Wherefore unto all Officers  
Of the Town she sent,  
That they perceiving her good Will,  
Which for the Weal was bent;  
That on the Day that she should ride,  
All Persons through the Town,  
Should keep their Houses shut, and Doors,  
And clap their Windows down;  
So that no Creature, young or old,  
Should in the Streets be seen;  
\*Till she had ridden all about,  
Throughout the City clean;  
And when the Day of Riding came,  
No Person did her see,  
Saving her Lord; after which Time,  
The Town was ever free.

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